



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of Marine Safety

Date: January 03, 2003

Place: Callusa Boat Yard

Person Interviewed: Kenny Wells – Everglades National Park Tours mechanic

Interview Conducted By: Jim Walsh,
Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Wells was interviewed in conjunction with investigation into the sinking of the *Panther*. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from my handwritten notes of the conversation and is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and recollection.

INTERVIEW

Mr. Wells has been working for the Tour Company since 1977. His responsibilities include maintenance and repair of all electrical and mechanical systems aboard the company's boats. Mr. Wells is a seasonal worker coming down from his home in Ohio every winter and returning to Ohio in the spring after high season. Mr. Wells was discharged from the US Army in 1952 and started work on the Ohio River. Mr. Wells subsequently went to work for a heavy farm equipment distributor where he specialized in maintenance and repair of diesel-powered tractors, combines, backhoes etc. Mr. Wells's formal training consisted of attending manufacturer's sponsored maintenance schools and working with manufacturer's representatives in the field on the equipment.

Mr. Wells was familiar with Caterpillar, Cummings, and Perkins engines from his work with the farm equipment firm. Mr. Wells also spoke of the affects of dust and moisture on the performance of electrical and mechanical systems in agriculture and construction and their similarities to marine exposures.

Mr. Wells was the first Tour Company employee to arrive at the NPS docks on the morning of

Dec. 30 – approx 0745. He had been informed the day before by the boat captain that the bilge pumps needed to be checked. Mr. Wells checked the *Panther's* three electric bilge pumps and found a corroded wire on the starboard quarter bilge pump – additionally Mr. Wells determined that the diesel starter switch would have to be replaced.

Mr. Wells started the work and informed the boat's captain that he would have to delay the boat's first trip until 10:00. Mr. Wells finished the wire and switch replacement, tested the pumps and switch, found their performance satisfactory and gave the boat an okay to go. Stanford Daniels, Mr. Wells's supervisor, informed the boat's captain that Mr. Wells had finished the work.

Using the *Panther II* as a model, Mr. Wells indicated which vents were for the fuel tank and the engine compartment. Additionally, Mr. Wells walked through his normal pre operational checks of the boats. With Mr. Hamilton (senior) agreeing, Mr. Wells said he would give the Board a bilge pump from the *Panther* to test in the lab.

END OF INTERVIEW

Jim Walsh